

## From the Frontline: What's Really Going on with Testing Coordination

Four questions were posted on the North Carolina school counselor listserv in December of 2003 regarding testing coordination and school counselors who were assigned this task.

(1) How much time is going into coordinating testing?

(2) What comprehensive counseling services are you not able to implement due to the time going into testing coordination?

(3) If the counselor is not the testing coordinator at your school, who is?

(4) If your school has hired a testing coordinator, where did they get the funding?

The following is a summary of the 143 responses received. Individual names have been removed for confidentiality and spacing inconsistencies due to e-mail formats have been corrected; however, no other edits were done including correcting any spelling or typographical errors.

### How much time is going into coordinating testing?

Most common answer results:

- 40-60% (varying from week to week)
- 80-100% during the time of a test
- averaging 10 to 20 hours per week
- 250 to 450 hours per year
- 1/3 to 1/2 of all counseling time
- 80-90 hours per test
- 400 hours yearly
- 34 days (not including trainings and preparation time)
- one to two solid weeks before each test
- 2 1/2 months of total time
- entire month of May is strictly devoted to testing
- Almost all respondents who reported approximately less than 40% shared the responsibility with one to two colleagues.
- Three respondents summarized time with testing as follows:

“You can't imagine how it makes me feel to see the assistant principal and principal trying to do the counseling I should be doing while I'm sitting in my office counting out pencils, rulers, test books, etc. This is NOT why I wanted to be a counselor and if there is one single thing that will drive me from this profession, it's testing.”

- NC School Counselor

►September: 85-90% of time planning for computer test & remediation.

October: 85-90% doing computer test

November: 60% of my time helping my colleague with Competency test and administering sessions

December: This is my "slow" month - maybe only about 20% planning for spring computer skills/remediation for February and thinking about NC Writing Test

January: 80% of time planning for spring computer skills and remediation

February: 90% Computer test window opens

March: Writing Test and Competency - 90% of time

April: Comprehensive test planning for end of month and start planning EOC's - 75%

May: EOC's - 85% at beginning of month; 100% of time from May 22nd on!

►XXXX County's Director of Student Services, XXXX XXXX, requires us to document each month how our time is spent. Since I had kept specific numbers of hours each month devoted solely to testing I simply had to average them. They ranged from 97-166 hours for the school year, which is an average of 133 hours/year. Based on a 7.5 hour school day, that is 18 days per year, or nearly an entire school month that my students were without a counselor!!

“I just resigned my job as a counselor for 6th graders in large part because I was made school testing coordinator... testing was all I did and my sixth graders were ignored.”

- NC School Counselor

►I have documentation from the past two years, during which I have served as the test coordinator for my school. On average, in 2001-2002, I spent 30 hours/month on testing. The following year, 2002-2003, the time was an average of 46 hours/month.

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### What comprehensive counseling services are you *not* able to implement due to the time going into testing coordination?

- Group and individual counseling sessions most common answer given
- classroom guidance during testing times
- any services that involve direct contact with students
- implementation of the Guidance and Counseling Standard Course of study
- group workshops for students and parents and be more visible and available for staff, students and parents for consultation on scholarships, ,
- delivering test taking strategies and reducing test anxiety strategies through classroom guidance, and/or small groups
- preventative programs/program development (suspension prevention, anti-bullying, violence reduction, character education, Career Day)
- preparing students and parents for a smooth transition to the next grade
- evaluate high school credits for graduation
- college admissions counseling to parents and students
- college application procedures/post secondary planning
- PSAT/SAT/ACT prep
- mediation/conflict resolution
- crisis management
- be available to my students
- academic achievement counseling
- newsletters
- meet with the AIG and EC students
- new student orientations
- parent workshops and conferences
- screening students for SSST
- Classroom Observations
- Home Visits
- attending retention meetings

"I think it effects (sp) each of the (counseling) functions in one way or another. However, what it boils down to is what are we most held accountable for... You could get fired for messing up a state test, but you won't get fired for dropping some of your career programming... or a few groups... or a couple of classroom guidance sessions etc..."

- NC School Counselor

### What services have been possible in schools in which counselors are *not* testing coordinators?

- "Given we have a testing coordinator this year we have the pleasure of the opposite problem ... this year we have been able to add programs for the first time since ABC testing was initiated. We have added small group counseling back into our program and have been able to expand other programs aimed at increasing motivation and dropout prevention for low performing students, as well as perform more individual counseling and provide more attention to our SSMT process."
- More direct contact with juniors and seniors as they prepare for college decisions and scholarship applications
- Meet with all freshmen to begin college and career planning by setting up profiles on the CFNC website.
- Multiple lessons supporting career/education selection with 8<sup>th</sup> graders getting ready for High School.
- Provide support to teachers at all levels with Guidance lessons and intigration (sp) of Character Education lessons into every course curriculum.
- Much more time in supporting students as the Chairman of the Student Assistance Team, a screening body for possible EC students.
- Spend a lot more time talking with teachers about individual students.
- Time to visit elementary schools to talk about Middle School prior to registration.
- Organized school wide Multi-Cultural Days.
- Organized Career Fair for 8th graders and field trip to the school system's Career Center.
- class changes

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- school-wide character ed program
- time with students who are suffering emotionally
- registration and four year planning
- assisting students with test anxiety
- working with ADD/HD testing issues
- group counseling, individual counseling, parent/teacher consultation,
- coordinate camps and programs
- help students with applications for colleges and scholarships
- classroom guidance sessions on self esteem, healthy relationships, anger management, conflict resolution, domestic violence, and sexual harassment.
- develop community volunteers and partnerships
- a program for students who are not reaching expectations by actively recruiting their parents
- able to expand our mentoring program to include many more students

### If the counselor is not the testing coordinator at your school, who is?

In order of most common to least common answer given:

- assistant principal
- IRT (Instructional Resource Teacher)/ CCR teachers (Cross Categorical Resource)
- curriculum coordinator
- media specialist
- certified teacher who also teaches one or two periods a day/half time teaching position
- Title I teacher
- teacher position used to create an Academic/Instructional Facilitator position
- Individually funded testing coordinator position
- intervention coordinator
- former math teacher
- Office Assistant
- clerical staff for the pre and post-testing logistics
- split between out drop-out prevention coordinator and an administrative assistant.
- literacy facilitator
- CDC (Career Development Coordinator)
- AG specialist (Academically Gifted)
- Registrar
- ("My Principal says if they take the job away from me, he would take one teacher from each grade level (3rd-5th) to be the Testing Coordinator for their grade.")
- ("A retired counselor or teacher can be hired to do testing part-time as a part-time position or as a substitute.")
- ("Some high schools found money for extra help from drink machines, dances, etc. to hire part time testing help.")
- ("The counselors are considering hiring a retired teachers (sp) to set up, enlist proctors, and to administer the AP exams, using the funds from the AP exam rebate of \$7/exam.")

"The test coordination task is at its best and worst a clerical job which requires someone who is good with all of the clerical task areas. It is not a task requiring special knowledge that any good assistant or secretary cannot handle. I am not sure what the original rationale was for using counselors or assistant principals for this task, but it is misguided."

- NC Drop-Out Prevention Specialist

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### Other Comments from Respondents:

- I have noticed significant differences this year (as I am not the testing coordinator) in the amount of time I am able to spend with each student building rapport and the number of groups I am able to facilitate. I feel like a much more effective counselor this year and the success of our new program, decrease in office referrals, and overall student success seems to reflect a positive change at least partially contributed by an increase in counseling time.
- The last 2 months of school I do not provide any counseling services.
- The other part that bothers me about being testing coordinator is that it puts me in an awkward position with my peers. I sometimes have to ask them to do things that I feel are more administrative (i.e. makeup test training, pick up tests on time, give me ACCURATE information for EC and LEP students, etc.).
- I think that some folks don't understand that for the test coordinator the test is not just an event that happens on one day or over several days.
- One year I had a student threatening suicide because he was afraid he wouldn't pass the test. The asst. principal had to handle it because I was in the middle of testing.
- Getting someone just to HELP me wouldn't cost another dime.
- Since being testing coordinator involves some "administrator like" duties such as giving teachers and assistants work assignments and messing with the school schedule, it seems that the most likely person to be test coordinator would be the assistant principal. Of course hiring a separate (sp) part time testing coordinator would be the best choice.
- Testing coincides with the times in schools when stress is the most high and students, parents, and staff are most likely to "melt down" and need extra assistance.
- The biggest thing that bothers me is that it always seems like I am neglecting individual student needs during testing coordination, especially during the week of testing. Herein lies an irony-- during the time students are under the most stress and anxiety during the school year and exhibit anxious behaviors, the school counselor is tied up and "can't leave the EOGs." Shouldn't the SC be available to help students deal with this stress?
- We are always reminded that we can lose our jobs if the testing program is faulty or if booklets are lost.
- Because I have been settled w/ testing coordination, I do not feel that my job responsibilities as school counselor are viewed to be important by my school district.
- Personally, I did not go to school to test. I don't mind helping when needed but I have a problem with spending a majority of my time on testing when my students suffer because I cannot offer them the services they need.
- The board of education is continually stressing the importance of positive testing results from our students, yet they have not created a position for a "testing coordinator".
- I believe I am a much more effective high school counselor now that I do not have the administrative responsibility of test coordinator and that the school district is getting more of what they are paying for instead of turning this counselor into a well paid clerk. Test coordination is a very time intensive, detail oriented duty. It does not however take a masters in counseling to do.
- This year, our department is able to see more students than we have in the last 8 years! Why? Because I stepped down from being the school's Testing Coordinator!
  - During the actual EOG testing, I would work from 6 am until the janitors kicked me out of the building at 9 or 9:30 pm!
  - Many folks do not understand that even if the counselor is doing nothing but what the counselor is supposed to be doing, the counselor-student ratios are such that it is almost impossible to do that job, much less the other job.
  - The reticent child is not going to continue to seek us out, once they've been discouraged. There is no way to know how many children continue in abusive situations or become increasingly anxious and depressed because of our unavailability.

"As a former high school counselor and a current high school assistant principal, I can see on both sides of the fence. However, my firm belief is that counselors should not be test coordinators for many reasons. First and foremost is that counselors already have more that they can do. Testing is such a priority for our state, it should be an administrative responsibility."

- NC Principal

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- Testing coordinators do NOT need a Masters Degree in counseling. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence, average organizational skills and unlimited time to devote to the task could do it. IT is a waste of skills and money for counselors to be responsible for this. Testing has probably driven more school counselors out of the field than any other one issue. Spending hours counting test books and shuffling schedules for teachers and proctors is not cost effective.
- The testing coordinator is one of the assistant principals. Counselors provide assistance with testing preparation for students by assisting students with test anxiety, working with ADD/HD testing issues, providing Study Skills and Academic Helps as needed to prepare students for EOG and all testing during the year. XXXX is a school of Excellence and met 19 out of 21 AYP's for last year's data! The way we do it @XXXX is working and I surely hope it won't Change!!
- School counselors are the only people in a school who routinely deal with student situations that could involve student safety (cutting, abuse, sexual harrassment, suicidal thoughts...) to deprive students of the services that we are trained to provide endangers not only those students, but the entire student body.
- I resent the fact that central office staff and state officials for that matter want to point their finger at me (and others like me) if I don't do enough in terms of small groups or work with the 'at risk population'. However, they still want me to run a testing program without irregularities and train staff adequately to minimize misadministrations (sp). I am not perfect and will make mistakes just like anyone else. However, the risk of these increases when more and more is piled on.
- Thank goodness XXXX School has listened to us and values our time with students, their parents, and the staff that serves the students. One of the Assistant Principals (XXXX) is the testing coordinator here this year.
- An AP (Assistant Principal) as Test Coordinator has more supervisory power in the school to have teachers comply with directives without a lot of hassle.
- God help the kids who had any kind of crisis going on (in May).
- A counselor cannot have a student load of 400 or 500 (or more) students, take care of them and all their needs, 504 coordination, scheduling, conferencing, drop out prevention, etc.....and do testing too.....It is unreasonable.
- A counselor in our county was recently fired for failing to provide test security, despite over ten years of excellence in counseling.
- According to the American School Counselor Association National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs, coordinating or administering cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests is considered a non school counseling activity.
- The national counselors' board has outlined standards of what counselors should be doing. Part of it says, "...every student has a right to benefit from a school counseling program that is comprehensive and proactive and that focuses on prevention and on students' developmental needs."
- ... administrators need a new refresher course on what the role of the school counselor is to be.
- I believe that legislators should consider the following:
  - Reducing the number of tests or creating a less labor- intensive way to administer tests. (This would reduce the time the test coordinator spends)
  - Mandating lower counselor to student ratios, such as 400 students per counselor. (This would reduce the volume of the materials handled. In larger schools this would provide for two counselors who could split the burden and provide even more counseling services)
  - Clearly stating the job description of a School Counselor. For instance mandating that 80% of our time should be in direct service to students.
  - Since this has become my Christmas "Wish List" I will throw one more in. Legislators should make it clear that school counselors are as valuable as Speech Therapists and School Psychologists by putting us on their pay scale.

"Many people are unaware that elementary counselors are required in NC schools for accreditation and that elementary school counselors have been provided with a guidance curriculum by the Department of Public Instruction with stated objectives and outcomes. The delivery of the required guidance curriculum involves classroom guidance and small groups. The test coordinator role effectively shuts down the counselor's ability to implement the counseling curriculum during the test period."

- *Common Myths about Counselors and Testing Responsibilities*,  
a study report done by a NC LEA

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## Sample School Testing Schedules:

Wednesday, Nov. 19

- 9-11:30 - Train teachers
- 2-3:30 - Prepare tests
- 8:30-10:30 PM - Prepare tests

Thursday, Nov. 20

- 8:30-9:30 - Reproduce and distribute rosters to teachers
- 9:30-10:30 - Plan who would test where  
Check in with teachers about administering special sections
- 10:30-11:00 - Count out tests
- Worked that evening, as well - Called S. XXXX re testing

Friday, Nov. 21

- 7:45-8:45 - Distribute tests
- 8:45-11:00 - Monitor testing
- 11:00-12:00 - Monitor extended time students
- 12:00-6:00 - Receive and check test documents, Plan calculator exchanges and other details,  
process answer sheets for scanner
- 8:00-8:30 PM - Call teachers re calculators

Monday, Nov. 24

- 7:30-10:30 - distribute, monitor, collect tests
- 12:00-3:00 - Collect, sort tests and calculators
- 7:30-8:30 PM - Process answer sheets for scanner

Plus calling parents to proctor and to arrange proctor schedules for each test session.

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October 6-7	9-weeks tests
October 11	SAT
October 21	PSAT
October 28-29	Computer Skills M/C Test (old & new)
Nov 5-6	Computer Skills Perf Test (old & new)
November	ASVAB
November 24-25	EOC field tests - if we are selected by NCDPI
December 2-3	Competency Testing
December 16-18	EOC Testing/9-weeks testing/Vocats
February 10	Computer Skills M/C (old & new)
February 17-18	Computer Skills Performance (old & new)
March 2	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Writing Assessment
March 8-9	9-weeks tests
March 27	SAT
April 27-28	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade HSCT
May 1	SAT
May 3	AP English Language Exam
	AP French Language Exam
May 4	AP Spanish Language Exam
May 5	AP Calculus Exam
May 6	AP English Literature Exam
	AP French Literature Exam
May 7	AP US History Exam
May 10	AP Biology Exam
May 11	AP Chemistry Exam
May 14	AP Spanish Literature Exam
May 11-12	Competency Tests (senior re-takes will be given, if necessary)
May 21-25	EOC Tests/9-weeks testing/Vocats

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### If your school has hired a testing coordinator, where did they get the funding?

The following are possible funding sources for testing coordination. Whether these budgets can actually be utilized for this purpose will have to be confirmed by individual LEA finance officers as it may vary from system to system.

- Waivers for Unavailable Categories (open chart with restrictions) (PRC 006)
- Title I (PRC 50)
- At-Risk Student Service (PRC 069)
- Improving Student Accountability Standards (072)
- Accountability Grants for Low Performing Schools (PRC 087)
- Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) (PRC 091)  
(allows certain schools maximum flexibility to spend funds from certain CFDA's)
- Transferability among specified Federal PRCs. (PRC 721)  
*What is Transferability* on the web at [www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/Transferability.doc](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/Transferability.doc)
- Local Monies
- ADM Allotment

"When administration wanted to increase an assistant principal from half-time to full time, they added the testing responsibilities."

- NC School Counselor

The Chart of Accounts can be found on the web at [www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/coa/default.html](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/coa/default.html)

#### **IMPORTANT NOTE**

**A testing coordinator is not an approved instructional support position for PRC 007. These State funds can be used for these positions only if an ABC transfer request to move funds to another budget is submitted and approved by the State. The conversion is at the state average salary plus benefits for instructional support. If a person is performing both the guidance and testing coordinator duties, the position should be prorated between the PRC007 budget and the other budget being used for testing coordination.**

In the State allotment manual, under INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT PERSONNEL - CERTIFIED, PROGRAM REPORT CODE: 007, it states:

"PURPOSE: Provides funding for salaries for certified instructional support personnel to implement locally designed initiatives which provide services to students who are at risk of school failure as well as the students' families. It is the intent of the General Assembly that the positions must be used first for counselors, then for social workers and other instructional support personnel which have a direct instructional relationship to students or teachers to help reduce violence in the public schools. They shall not be used as administrators, coordinators, supervisors, or directors."

"Unfortunately I cannot neglect my testing duties for counseling, because the county simply would not accept counseling duties over testing. In this day and time when students are facing situations that I never had to face such as 9/11, Jonesboro Arkansas, Columbine, etc. is it wise to ignore the social and emotional needs of our students? I think not. "

- NC School Counselor